

NATIONAL TOWN MEETING
REMARKS BY AND QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD
WITH DR. ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

MODERATOR: WINSTON LORD, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Eisenhower Theater, Kennedy Center

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MR. LORD: Welcome to the National Town Meeting here at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Today's topic is "The World in 1980, America's Basic Options". This nation is passing through a transition era in foreign policy that began roughly a decade ago. For most of our history, we were essentially isolationists, our national security assured by two oceans, the British Navy and friendly neighbors.

For two decades after World War II, we enjoyed a fleeting predominance. Now, we can neither escape from the world nor dominate it. We remain the strongest nation and we continue to carry global responsibilities, but we have to deal with many other centers of power and new definitions of power. In facing this challenge, Americans are still sorting out the experiences of Munich and Vietnam. But it would seem in the past year we have seen the growth of a more assertive mood in the nation at large.

Recent events in Asia, and the fact that 1980 is an election year, combine to make this an especially opportune time to debate this country's choices abroad. And the one steady, clear message from the early Presidential primaries is that Americans are turning out in huge numbers to register their deep concern about the international role of the United States as well as about its economic strength, which is essential to that role.

Few people are better qualified by virtues of experience and position to address today's topic than our honored guest, Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. For three years he has briefed the President daily on global developments, directed the National Security Council staff and systems which insured that the President gets views of all agencies concerned with our foreign policy, made his own policy recommendations and carried out important missions overseas.

Dr. Brzezinski came to his present responsibilities from a rich background, a scholar and observer of this country's foreign policy for over two decades and service on the State Department's Policy Planning Council in the late 1960s. He was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1928, and came to North America at the age of 10, educated at McGill University in Canada and Harvard University.

He taught at Harvard in Columbia, spoke prolifically on foreign affairs and was a member and director of many organizations including one I am impelled to mention, the Council on Foreign Relations. The international issues facing America in 1980, can be grouped broadly under three headings, Allied cooperation, East-West competition, and North-South accommodation. The crises in Iran and Afghanistan have profound ramifications in all three areas, the nature of our reaction to Soviet aggression, the cohesion or cracks in the western approach and our capacity to deal with political turmoil and economic resources of the third world.

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Q Good morning, Dr. Brzezinski. My name is Jay Marks, and I am from Fairfield, Connecticut, with the Washington Workshops Program, and I would like to know how you feel about the CIA and is it still the world's finest intelligence-gathering agency, or do you believe that the Carter Administration has put undue pressure and limitations on its activities, forcing it to take a backseat to the KGB or, say, the British or Israeli bureaus?

DR. BRZEZINSKI: Well, I don't know how one engages in a comparative appraisal of intelligence services, because to engage in a comparative appraisal of intelligence services one would have to know things about the KGB and the Mossad and MI-5 and the CIA that I do not know. But I am unfortunately not in a position to make a conclusive analysis of how much we know that they don't know and how much they know that we don't know because if I did then there wouldn't be things I didn't know that they did know. (Laughter.) (Applause.)

Let me say this, however, about the CIA. The CIA went through a difficult period brought on, in part, by certain excesses in which some of its officers engaged; in larger part, by a strong popular wave, a reaction generated by the Vietnamese War. We need a good intelligence agency. I have, in the course of my three years here, been very impressed by the quality of the rank and file that works in the CIA. I am particularly impressed by their technological capabilities, by their monitoring services, by the sophistication of their intelligence-gathering operations.

I have voiced, from time to time, the view that we need to improve the quality of our political intelligence and I believe that the need for such improvement is derived not only, perhaps, from at one-time inadequate emphasis on that particular aspect of intelligence within the agency, but more generally, from our cultural style. We, as a country, are much more preoccupied with events and with facts than with understanding the interrelationships between facts, with deep analysis of causes and effects.

This is true about journalism. Our newspapers report facts day to day and, on the whole, very well. They rarely report trends, and yet it is trends that give you understanding of facts. You have to have a basis for judging and relating facts. We don't do this as a culture.

We don't emphasize literary styles enough. There is nothing more important to a policy-maker than a brief, well-written insightful analysis of other people's motives, views, aspirations and judgments. It is these things that need to be improved. And, therefore, I have striven in the course of my three years, working closely with my associates in the agency, to help the agency improve particularly its political intelligence, and we have made progress in that direction. I believe positive developments have taken place.

The legislation now pending before Congress, I think, will strike the proper balance between the controls that are needed to ensure that this agency which operates under very confidential circumstances is not out of control. Yet the controls should not inhibit effective intelligence, including covert activity, because as a country dealing in a rough world, we need both. And we shouldn't be shy about admitting it. We should be mature enough to face the reality that if we are going to operate in the world scene, we have to have eyes and ears, and the Agency is that. (Applause.)

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